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ABSTRACT

A study examined the influence of cultural values on classroom behaviors of adult Vietnamese refugees. More specifically, the study was designed to determine the effect of culturally acquired attitudes and personality traits on the refugees' classroom behaviors, the relationship between these behaviors and the cognitive learning styles favored by Vietnamese students, and the implications of these preferences for selecting materials and instructional approaches to facilitate second-language learning. To collect these data, the researcher observed the classroom behaviors of 18 Vietnamese students in an advanced-level course offered under the Refugee Services Program, English for Speakers of Other Languages, of Montgomery County, Maryland. These observations revealed that the students manifested little if any initiative or interaction with one another while in class. Options confused them, as did individual or small group activities. However, they did begin to show some competitive skills when broken into teams. Such behavior reflects the Oriental stress on passive humility as opposed to the American emphasis on socialization and independent action. To deal effectively with Indochinese students, teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) must understand these differences and not view reserved behavior as a manifestation of laziness or lack of intelligence. (MN)

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THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL VALUES ON CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS OF ADULT VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. William E. DeLorenzo, Department of Education Curriculum and Instruction for a course titled Research and Theory in Foreign Language and ESOL Teaching in the Fall 1981 semester. A substantially shorter version was presented at the Lifelong Learning Research Conference held under the auspices of the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Maryland, College Park campus, On February 17-18, 1983.

*Please do not give me the title of "Doctor," as I will only be completing my coursework in the PhD program this summer.

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ABSTRACT

A native American teacher of English as a Second Language to adult Vietnamese refugees often encounters classroom behaviors contrary to those encouraged in the American school and in a democratic society. To some extent, these student behaviors result from frustration in learning a second language so different from their native one. Most obvious are the structural differences between the English and Vietnamese languages. Less apparent are the cultural values and societal pressures which influence attitudes toward education and affect second language acquisition. Classroom behavior reflects this cultural perspective. Furthermore, educational experiences as a child may foster the lifelong preference of certain learning styles. Implications for the foreign language or ESOL teacher and counselor are that effective instruction can be possible only when educators become aware of the affective and sociological factors in learning, as well as the cognitive processes.

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City in 1975, the first group of Vietnamese refugees came to the United States. For the most part, these immigrants were well educated, upper class military officers or government officials and their families. Three years later, a wave of "Boat People," among them ethnic Chinese and Laotians of the Hmong tribe, followed their countrymen to the U.S. in order to escape the Communist regime. This time, most of the people came from outlying rural areas. Many had never been inside a school. All but a few had spent grueling months in refugee camps in Cambodia or Laos. Their families had been torn apart by famine and war. (Mennonite Central Committee, 1979.)

American educators were forced to consider how best to assimilate all these new immigrants into the mainstream of democratic society. In 1975, the process was efficient and productive, because these sophisticated urbanites and technicians were able to adjust rapidly to their new conditions. However, for those who came later, it seemed that "the melting pot" would never come to a boil! Nguyen Tanh Thai* was shy, dependent and slow, stubbornly resisting the friendly, hearty, open ministrations of Mrs. McGinn,* teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages. Mrs. M. was frustrated by the lack of response to her meticulous lesson plans. She was confused, because these same techniques had worked well to motivate her Hispanic students the previous semester. Yet studies continued to show that Asian students, after a time in American schools, "caught up" and eventually surpassed native Americans as a group. (Ayabe & Santo, 1972; Stodolsky & Lesser, 1967; Chen & Goon, 1976.)

The mystery began to unravel when Vietnamese cultural "liaisons" and resource people formulated some guidelines for

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* All names are fictitious.

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Americans who were working with this population. Even a cursory sampling of this material can provide insights for the teacher, counselor, and social worker.(Ladu, 1968; Bridge, 1978; Bridging, 1978; A guide, 1978.)

Exploration of important cultural traditions is essential for American teachers of immigrant students. This belief is held by many school administrators throughout the country. For the past several years, Montgomery County (Maryland) has conducted Multicultural Workshops as inservice training for all personnel who have contact with international students. The Center for Applied Linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. published a series of Refugee Education Guides which they made available through the ERIC system. If "reaching" international students is a priority, educators must concentrate on teaching not only the specifics of grammatical structure and idiomatic expression, but also the cultural aspects of American life so bewildering to the second language learner.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A native American teacher of English as a Second Language to adult Vietnamese refugees often encounters classroom behaviors contrary to those encouraged in the American school and in a democratic society. To some extent, these student behaviors result from frustration in learning a second language so different from their first. Most obvious are the structural differences between the English and the Vietnamese languages. The latter:

1. is monosyllabic.
2. has a tonal component to differentiate between identical morphemes.
3. lacks articles, prepositions, modals, and verb inflections.

Less apparent are the cultural values and societal pressures which influence attitudes toward education and affect second language acquisition. An adult brought up in Vietnam seems to

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approach learning from a perspective other than the American student's. Classroom behavior reflects this cultural perspective.

Furthermore, educational experiences as a child may foster the preference of certain learning styles (approaches to problem-solving) throughout life. It is this aspect of the problem upon which the study concentrated.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In attempting to discover whether Vietnamese culture and tradition have fostered the adoption of certain cognitive learning styles (problem-solving strategies) and have discouraged others, the following questions were considered:

1. What culturally acquired attitudes toward education do Vietnamese students bring with them into the American classroom?
2. What culturally influenced values of personality and personal behavior do Vietnamese students bring into the American classroom?
3. How do these attitudes and values manifest themselves in observable behaviors in the classroom?
4. Which of these behaviors seem counterproductive or contrary to those expected and nurtured by the American school in our democratic society?
5. How do these behaviors reflect certain cognitive learning styles favored by Vietnamese students?
6. What are the implications for selecting materials and instructional approaches to facilitate second language acquisition for these students?

ASSUMPTIONS

Based on research in cognitive learning style theory (Witkin, 1962; 1975) it can assumed that every student exhibits a characteristic approach to problem-solving which is an integral part of his personality. As the student matures, one mode of

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thinking becomes dominant in all learning situations. A further assumption was that it is possible for the teacher to "map" or profile a student's cognitive learning style by observing classroom behaviors, and thus to develop guidelines for selecting teaching approaches and instructional materials to facilitate second language acquisition (Hill, 1964.) Aptitude Treatment Interaction (ATI) studies claim the possiblity of altering the learning environment to match the learning preferences of individual students (Snow, 1969.)

Another assumption was that international students bring culturally determined attitudes and values toward education into the American classroom. Western observers are often unable to comprehend the Asian personality, with its values of self-effacement, patience, self-control, and the concept of "face." In exploring some of the values in Vietnamese culture, this researcher made the assumption that greater dependence upon authority in the classroom results from respect for age and position in the Oriental tradition. Even when the teacher is younger than the students, the status of "teacher" seems inviolable. (Chaleunrath, 1981.)

The final assumption was that the importance of the cultural component of language must not be overlooked (Brooks, 1966; Kaplan, 1966.) Research in bilingual/bicultural education suggests that acquiring a second language is not simply learning another way to say the same thing. Every language has cultural and historical overtones, and the successful language learner will be exposed to a different mode of thinking. According to the Sapir-Whorf theory of cultural relativism, one's first language provides a "world view" through which all perceptions are filtered and expressed. Sociolinguistics, the field that describes language use in a community of speakers, focuses on the cultural biases which affect second language learning.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions have been derived from a review of literature on learning styles. Human cognition is scaled on a continuum, with polarities or extremes designated for each term.

1. Learning Styles: characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment.
2. Cognitive Learning Styles: the mode of thinking most characteristic of an individual's learning strategies (problem-solving techniques).
3. a) Field Dependence: concerned with the whole picture, needing structure and a frame of reference, easily distracted by irrelevancies, using deductive reasoning.
   b) Field Independence: analyzing individual components, concentrating on the task, using inductive reasoning.

Related bipolar terms are global/analytical; broadening/narrowing; leveling/sharpening; passive/active learners.

4. Other factors in learning styles:
   a) Dominant Perceptual Sense: whether learner responds best to oral, visual, tactile, or psychomotor stimuli.
   b) Environmental Preferences: whether learner prefers heat or cold, enclosed or open space, bright or subdued lighting, noise or quiet.
   c) Locus of Control: whether learner assumes responsiblity for actions (internal control) or blames circumstances or "luck" (external control).
5. Cognitive Learning Style Mapping: a profile of preferred modes of thinking and learning strategies and behaviors.
6. Aptitude Treatment Interaction: (ATI) an attempt to match the learning environment (teaching style, materials, classroom, grouping) to the preferred learning style of the student.

Other terms used in this study:

7. ESL: English as a Second Language. While students are learning English, they receive instruction in "content" courses (e.g. history) in their native language.
8. ESOL: English to Speakers of Other Languages. Often erroneously used interchangeably with ESL. The difference is that in ESOL instruction is in English, with other subjects being postponed until the required level of English proficiency is reached. If students from many language backgrounds must be grouped in one class, "total immersion" is the most efficient treatment. Bilingual education depends on bilingual teachers being available, and deals with both the structures and the cultural aspects of the second language.

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POPULATION FOR THE STUDY

The Refugee Services Program, English for Speakers of Other Languages, of Montgomery County (Maryland), was funded by the federal government under Title VII of the Immigration Policy Act of 1980. It was administered by the Montgomery County Department of Social Services, and was implemented by CETA and the Montgomery County Department of Adult Basic Education. Under a twelve-month grant (May 1981 through April 1982), Southeast Asian up-county residents, who were screened as having refugee status, were selected for an intensive English language course at Randolph Jr. High School in Rockville. (The site was changed to Parkland Junior High School about a month after its inception.)

The on-site personnel were a program coordinator, a bilingual Vietnamese secretary, and one full time and two part time instructors. Approximately sixty-five Vietnamese, Laotians, ethnic Chinese, and Cambodians were served concurrently in four classes of fifteen to nineteen students each. In the course of the year, about three times that number were expected to complete the program.

Classes met five days a week, with students attending either in the morning (8:30-11:30 AM) or afternoon (1:00-4:00 PM) session. Each student was taught by two instructors.

The subjects for this study consisted of approximately eighteen "Level 4" students. However, [illegible] a turnover every three months, when progress reports were submitted.

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Students moved up to the next level, or "graduated" to CETA job training programs, or went on to study at schools like Montgomery College or the Capitol Institute of Technology.

The program goal was to improve English language communication skills to the point at which students were "job-ready" and could work toward self-support and independence.

PROCEDURES

As soon as the scope of the present study was determined, an ERIC computer search was made. A wealth of material was listed on both topics: cognitive learning styles and Vietnamese culture, as well as handbooks and sponsor guides dealing with refugee education and counseling. However, there had been little attempt to relate the two specifically, although a few studies recommended using a theoretical cognitive style base in general bilingual education.

For this study, a review of literature was undertaken to analyze research findings and to determine how individual learning styles are recognized in problem-solving behaviors. There followed a study of Vietnamese cultural attitudes toward education and child-rearing. It was necessary to examine also those personality traits which are prized in Vietnamese society and which become internalized as part of the adult's value system. For this purpose, a survey was made of Indochinese Refugee Education Guides, published both in this country and in Canada. Finally, behaviors in a 4th-level ESOL class of adult

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Vietnamese refugees were described. Implications were drawn from the observed classroom behaviors as evidence of cultural influences on both student motivation and on cognitive learning styles.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cognitive Learning Style Theory: Although the term"cognitive learning style" appeared in the literature in the 1950's, the result of the first significant study was not published until 1962 by Herman Witkin. He was concerned with "modes of perception"--how students acquire information from their environment. These had little to do with IQ, but rather were characteristic approaches to problem-solving. He called his differentiated groups "field dependent" or "field independent," and explained that the former needed to see the entire picture (relationships) while the independents focused on details (sequential). Their styles were indicative of either deductive (general to particular reasoning) or inductive (the reverse). Witkin described a polarity, but found that his subjects located themselves along a continuum: few saw only the details or only the whole. In figure/ground puzzles, field dependents were easily distracted from the task of concentrating on the figure by irelevant features in the background. Since the original studies, Witkin has become interested in relating cognitive learning styles to cultural factors (Witkin, 1979; Witkin & Berry, 1975.)

Holzman and Gardner (1966) contributed the following definition: "Cognitive style is a composite of cognitive controls."

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Some of these control principles are "leveling/sharpening, flexible/rigid approach, differentiation/undifferentiation, and tolerance/intolerance for unrealistic experiences (like nonsense words). Students tend to look for either similarities (leveling, undifferentiation) or differences (sharpening, differentiation) between new problems and past experiences. Again, this type of approach to problem-solving was not found to be a factor of intelligence.

In 1965, Jerome Kagan identified "analytic and non-analytic" individuals, again connecting either an attention to detail or a "global" approach to a characteristic learning style. But Kagan's group also coined the terms "impulsivity/reflectivity," the poles of "conceptual tempo." Reflective individuals think before they speak, examining details in the light of past experience. They are slow to answer, because they want to be sure first that they are right. They do not depend on environmental feedback in the form of reassurance from teachers or reactions from peers. Their "locus of control" is internal. For this reason, these field independents often seem cold or antisocial when they do not seek such reassurance, but rely on their own best judgment. Impulsive students give rapid-fire answers as they come to mind, volunteer answers, and are perceived by teachers as "risk-takers." They are much more prone to error, but the speed of response and the number of responses, with feedback from others, make them quick learners.

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A study by Renate Schulz (1977) described how the student learns best by following his preferences. Some need more structure and direction; some are visually oriented; some have short attention spans and require a change of physical position often. These characteristics were once considered to be true of all children, who would be expected to "outgrow" bad study habits. But Schulz found that these learning requirements are as much a part of the personality as introversion or extroversion. She also mentioned cultural influences, memory, and reasoning skills as relating to successful learning (emphasis mine.)

The Messick Model (1976) presented nine bipolar dimensions, starting with field dependence/independence, and incorporating such concepts as complexity/simplicity, leveling/sharpening, and constricted versus flexible control. Later, other factors were included in "creativity" studies: breadth of categorizing (broad, inclusive; or narrow, exclusive); scanning; automatization (handling of repetitive tasks); convergent/divergent thinking (seeking one "right" answer, or brainstorming many options).

Other researchers attempted to match some of these models. Both reflective and impulsive students may persevere in a learning task, but the rate of response and the attention paid to the teacher/peer reaction differ markedly. A high correlation was usually found between reflectivity and field independence, and between impulsivity and field dependence. But as soon as these inferences were drawn, new studies would offer contradictory findings.

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In the 40's, Guilford had developed a three-dimensional scheme with the "orders of cognition" arranged in a hierarchy. Useful for test construction, the Dimensions of Intellect model made teachers aware of how many of their questions required only simple factual recall (most objective, multiple-choice tests) and how few called for application of principles or synthesis of original patterns. Joseph Hill (1964) built a model based on Guilford's factor analysis of the cognitive process. Hill's technique became known as Cognitive Style Mapping. This map of individual learning strategies had far-reaching implications for both homogeneous placement of students with similar environmental and systemic preferences (ATI) and for individualized instruction.

Since the Inventory was based on 224 statements to which students responded, Hill found a vast number of permutations possible in his student profiles. It soon became apparent that the ways in which a student deals with problem-solving are affected by factors other than sheer cognitive skills. The thinking process cannot be separated from the physiological, perceptual, affective, and sociological influences on the individual. All of these studies provided clues to the complexity of human cognition, and demonstrated the folly of attempting to formulate rigid categories by which to label students.

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Application to Foreign Language Teaching: Naiman and his associates hypothesized that the successful language learner is field independent, has flexible control (not distracted by first language interference), categorizes at neither extreme (not overgeneralizing nor too specific), and is tolerant of ambiguity. (1977) However, only the first and last factors were found to be significant predictors of success in language learning.

Douglas Brown (1973) found an apparent contradiction: field independents have the advantage in language acquisition, but field dependents are better at production (use). The former concentrate on the structure of the language, while dependents are concerned with communication. The way that people learn a language depends on their motivation, as well as their cognitive skills. When the learner is an immigrant, the cultural component must be considered. Robert Kaplan (1966) has theorized about different logical systems in different cultural groups, claiming that organizing principles are learned along with the lexicon of a language.

Vietnamese Attitudes toward Education: Almost half a million people from Indochina sought refuge in the United States during 1975-76 (Kim Hong Nguyen, 1976.) The first influx was of well educated, upper class Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians, who had been military officers or government officials until the Communist takeover. The "new immigrants"

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who entered the country after 1977 presented a different problem for American educators. Some were ethnic Chinese who had lived for generations in Indochina. Others were from back-country rural or mountain areas, like the Hmong tribe in Laos. Many had never received formal schooling, and were illiterate in their own language. There were Vietnamese and Cambodians, adults who had been educated under the French system in the 60's. (Nguyen, 1976.) No matter how great their differences, most Americans saw these immigrants as a homogeneous group. Because of this, self-help organizations sprang up as one answer for these truly displaced people.

The Indochinese Community Center for Refugees in Washington, D.C., was started in 1977 with a grant from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. Its mission was to help newcomers with health screening, housing applications, employment, education and training, and cultural orientation. (Chaleunrath, 1981.) The goal was reached with a "green card"--proof of permanent resident status.

Difficulties arose when the children of these refugees entered American schools. Children of farmers and children of businessmen would not have sat in the same classroom in their homeland, yet in this country they were put together. In their native country, boys and girls were segregated, both in school and at play. The teacher had complete authority. He read from prepared notes, and called on the boys for recitation. Girls were segregated with women teachers. There was no class discussion as we know it. Teachers did not expect to be interrupted, challenged, questioned,

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or even asked for clarification. Sole authority rested with the teacher, his influence extending even beyond the classroom. He was considered the "spiritual father" whose word was to be obeyed even before that of the natural parent. A body of knowledge was imparted through lectures and learned by rote. Children took notes, memorized, recited, and produced the material in written essays as given. It is hard to imagine that "objective" or multiple-choice tests were unknown. In Vietnamese schools, there were no games, no recess, and only academic subjects were studied. Classes were totally teacher-directed, with little interaction among the students. A Vietnamese student would neither seek help nor ask questions, as such would be considered a reflection both on the teacher and on the student himself.

In a handbook prepared by a female Vietnamese school psychologist in Illinois (1977), three major philosophical strains were traced to find the roots of Oriental personality development. Buddhism stressed self-negation, modesty, and humility; Confucius taught respect for ancestors and tradition; and Taoists strove for harmony between man and nature, and for harmony among men. These major values emerged: age brings wisdom; individual patience and self-effacement are rewarded in a oneness with the Eternal; truth exists for man to discover. Oriental tradition aims for social harmony: no conflict or confrontation can be tolerated. Politeness demands a smile and a nod for agreement, even when one does not agree. Because destiny is not known, one must endure that which one does not understand. He cannot

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control his fate, but he can maintain dignity in the face of it. Greek Stoicism is the parallel of this philosophy in Western thought.

The concept of "face" was stressed in a handbook for sponsors of Vietnamese refugees, prepared by the Travelers' Aid Society of Chicago (1978). Pride mandates that a person request no aid or charity except from his family. The extended family was so strong a unit that Social Security was unnecessary in Southeast Asian countries. Sociologists have seen these mores of reciprocity practiced by many peoples: Filipinos, Africans, Italians, Chinese. The latter had "merchants' associations" in the overpopulated ghettos of New York before public welfare was born. In these societies, including the modern Vietnamese, the family cared for its young until they were grown and for the old when they were no longer self-sufficient. Major decisions were made jointly, with the approval of all. Individualism or self-reliance was considered disrespectful, a sign that a young person was becoming rebellious against the ways of his ancestors. A brief contrast follows:

Vietnamese	American
Passive acceptance of one's role.	/Active striving for "success."
Humility, family control, cooper.	/Aggressiveness, freedom to compete.
Looking to the past for guidance.	/Future- and goal-oriented.
Harmony with nature.	/Mastery over nature.
Spiritualism.	/Materialism.
Indirect, circular reasoning.	/Confrontation, linear argument.

(For a theory that links language with logical reasoning systems, cul[illegible]d, see the work of Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf, and more recently, Robert Kaplan.)

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Effects of Cultural Shock in the Classroom:

Although the linguistic differences are great between English and Vietnamese (phonology, intonation, syntax, orthography), the cultural differences are just as overwhelming. (Manitoba Department of Education handbook, 1980.) The very gestures which accompany speech, as well as the customs behind the language, may lead to misunderstanding. Additional problems are the diverse educational methods and social expectations in the two countries. In the classroom, children followed their native communicative styles:

1. "Yes" answered all direct questions. Disagreement would mean confrontation, resulting in insult to the teacher or display of one's ignorance.

2. No eye contact was made, and the face remained a mask. In this way, feelings could be hidden and a calm exterior maintained. Contrary to Western style, no clues from "body language," gesture, tone of voice, or facial expression of the speaker could be perceived by the listener.

3. In order to maintain self-control, one sat quietly with head down, taking notes, or with eyes downcast, listening to the lecture or to directions from the teacher. A student spoke only when called upon. He would not say, "I don't know," but remained silent until passed over or dismissed by the teacher.

4. He engaged in no conversation with his classmates, taking all direction from the teacher. *

* All of these behaviors were observed in the researcher's own classroom, as confirmation of the information provided in the Refugee Education Guides. Please see references.

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Despite the opposite social contexts, the American teacher can be helped toward appreciating these newest ESOL students. When Kim Thi* behaves politely and formally, as she was brought up, she is considered uncooperative or withdrawn. When she refuses to express her wishes or opinions, she is labelled "unmotivated." For her lack of eye contact and her stiff, straight posture, she becomes in the eyes of her teacher, disturbed or even dishonest. Mrs. McGinn* complains that Kim never displays her knowledge, never volunteers--never even accepts compliments! Kim will not even admit when she is ill. Mrs. McGinn concludes that shyness prevents Kim from asking for or accepting help.

All the handbooks agree that before Tanh* or Kim or Thuy* can receive an effective education, Mrs. McGinn will need a cultural "briefing." Thuy's war experiences have been devastating enough. But in addition, she has witnessed a loss of parental authority and a breakdown of family cohesion which was the basis of her life before. Her father has been powerless to maintain traditions, and the world they knew no longer exists. Worst of all, the child cannot communicate her fears to her own father, much less to a teacher whom she neither understands nor trusts.

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*Fictitious names.

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OBSERVED CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

In an ESOL class of eighteen adult Vietnamese refugees, the following initial behaviors* were observed. Men and women segregated themselves on opposite sides of the room. Later, it was discovered that there were some husband/wife and brother/sister couples who did not sit together at first. Everyone sat stiffly in place, head bent and eyes downcast, attempting to take notes on every word spoken by the teacher. They interrupted their writing only to look up words in pocket dictionaries. Otherwise, no one moved from beginning to end of the period, unless expressly directed to write on the blackboard by the teacher. Responses to direct questions, or to commands such as "Raise your hand," were brief sidelong glances and blank expressions. Even after some time, when forced to make verbal responses, the answers were always inaudible. Individuals waited until the whole group could reply together. There were no volunteers. Men were able to keep their silence for the most part, but the girls often giggled behind their hands. There was no conversation sustained among the students, and certainly no discussion of the lesson, either in English or Vietnamese. Brief verbal exchanges occurred between two people of the same sex and family who were sitting together, but they did not look into each other's faces.

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* When they first observed the class, the students had been in the U.S. for an average of two months. However, they were not beginning English students. Some had been taught the language while in refugee camps in Cambodia and Laos, at least to read and write at the P+ level.

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No initiative was displayed. Much as they wanted to write everything down, the students waited for directions from the teacher, even to take out notebooks and pens. They waited for textbooks to be distributed, and they waited for the page number to be given, even when they were not all working at the same pace or when they remembered the page number from the previous day. They did not call each other by name, and even after some time had passed, still insisted on the honorific "Teacher."

It seemed that every exercise had to be first demonstrated or modeled by the teacher. After a few weeks, when they could have been expected to recognize forms and formats, they still waited for directions and announcements.

If offered a choice of activities, they could not or would not choose. They waited for the teacher to become impatient and choose for them. Options confused them, as did individual or small group activity. But they would not admit to confusion, so that it was difficult to know when help was needed. No one asked for clarification or for assistance, except from a deskmate.

On a field trip to the public library, they huddled together, lined themselves up, and marched like children from one section to the other. When the librarian asked if they understood or had any questions, they did not answer, but only smiled with downcast eyes.

In contrast, a few months later, on a visit to the Post Office Research and Development Center, they were fascinated by the electric cars and sophisticated computers and satellite

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disks. Perhaps outside of the classroom setting, they could behave again as adults. Still, they would not or could not respond to such goal-oriented questions as: "What will you do?" "What would you like to do?" "What would you do if...?"

COMPARISON AND UPDATE

The program began in May, 1981. After four months, most of the "Level 4" students were ready to "graduate" to jobs or to further language or vocational training. Probably, only their deep respect for education and the position of the teacher had kept them coming to such an alien environment. By September, they were calling each other by name in class, making eye contact, reading faces, and chattering in Vietnamese between recitations. A few males and females were sitting together (if related by family.) Dictionaries were left at home. They were able to answer content questions on reading material, and also to make inferences and predictions, based on the knowledge they had gained about American culture. Original stories were written and told. Many sessions were filled with role-playing and word games. Although they still did not enter into class discussions and waited politely for each person to recite in turn, they were showing some competitive skills when broken into teams. Faces were beginning to show animation, and voices too had more tonal coloration. Students were exchanging pleasantries with the teacher outside of class. Further, they were learning to seek and give information independent of teacher direction. By January, many of them had enrolled at Montgomery College, and

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worked part time in the cafeteria or in the offices. They were praised by their proud former teacher, and told, "This is the best way to learn conversational English: to work with Americans who can't speak your language!"

MATCHING CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS TO LEARNING STYLES

In a 1972 study, Asian American second graders demonstrated that they had already absorbed their traditional cultural values of "perserverance, restraint, and patience." (Ayabe & Santo, "Conceptual Tempo and the Oriental American.") They sought precise information, and were unwilling to volunteer answers quickly for fear of either "showing off" or showing their ignorance. They exhibited all the signs of reflective analytical thinkers by the age of seven! The socialization process described by Castaneda (cited by Gardner, 1980) is that values of a cultural group (ways of perceiving and thinking) influence styles of teaching and child-rearing (relational and motivational factors)which influence children's communication styles which finally produce their cognitive learning styles. These same characteristics of "reflective Asians" had been found by Jerome Kagan (1966), and was described again in a pamphlet titled "The Asian Connection" (Claremont Reading Conference, 1976). The cultural component of these learning styles cannot be ignored. Education is valued highly, and the position of the teacher is next to that of king. Students are

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expected to learn what is taught, uncritically, and allow themselves to be molded into conformity with the society's standards. These are the attitudes toward education that the Vietnamese students bring with them into the American classroom.

The individual achieves fulfillment by submerging himself into the cosmos, by surrendering himself to fate, and by rising spiritually above physical and material desires. He does not put himself forward, by being competitive or aggressive, but strives for harmony with men and nature. These culturally influenced values are deeper than "politeness" or "face" considerations. They are part of the Oriental personality and philosophy. Translated into classroom behaviors, these attitudes and values mandate that the student not challenge the teacher nor call attention to himself in any way. He tries to do what is expected of him, but he does not initiate action. He prefers to work independently with paper and pencil and avoids oral performance. He cooperates with his peers, waits his turn, and avoids competitive situations.

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

The whole weight of the Oriental culture and tradition is brought to bear upon the child to achieve well in school. Since scholars are held in high esteem, the child would risk bringing shame to the family if he did not give his best effort. Asian schools offered little opportunity for physical exploration or manipulation of the environment, because the philosophical

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underpinnings of education claim no control for man over nature or fate. Shortage of books and materials made memorization of lecture notes the main mode of learning. The authoritarian teacher provided not only all of the curriculum, but also the structure and circumstances under which it must be learned.

In contrast, the American school proffered a different set of expectations, born of the democratic ideal of independence in thought and action. In our society, children are to be "weaned away" from dependence, whereas in Asian cultures, the "shared-function family" discourages individuality. Where Oriental teachers expect memorization of a body of information and conformity to given standards, Americans have contrary goals of an analytical mind in a sociable body. The Vietnamese students reacted to this radical "switch in signals" by withdrawing and suffering in silence. In our society, students are to take the initiative often, to engage in class discussions and activities, to actively compete against their classmates and against their own past performance. All of these behaviors run counter to the Vietnamese student's "natural" (read "learned") inclinations.

In the language of the American teacher, "quick" learners are those risk-taking, impulsive individuals who are the first to volunteer an answer. They are perceived as learning, even when they make errors. "How will you learn if you don"t try? You have to learn from your own mistakes!" we say. "Slow" learners are those who hold back and answer only reluctantly when called upon. We say that they are unmotivated or lazy--

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or not so bright. The Vietnamese child is brought up to respect his teacher, to cooperate with his peers, and to control his actions and desires. The American child learns to be aggressive, to compete, and to question authority. No wonder that the Vietnamese student is often unappreciated when he exhibits reflective, field dependent, analytical behaviors. According to Cognitive Style Mapping, this is a hopeless contradiction in the profile. According to research, the field dependence is a jarring note! The mode of thinking is deductive; given a rule by the teacher, they can work out the example. They seek the approval of both teacher and peers as constant reassurance of proper performance. But their analysis is not inductive, because they have difficulty in generalizing (transferring knowledge to another context, or abstracting). However, their manner is to work with small pieces of the puzzle, rather than to deal with the whole picture. They do not fit one "cognitive style," because the cultural component is so strong.

The Vietnamese student asks no questions and seeks no help because he does not want to insult the teacher by seeming to misunderstand, nor to reveal his own ignorance. The Vietnamese student is "slow" because she reflects upon her answers and prefers to be right rather than first. She is "passive" because she looks to her teacher and peers for approval and for direction. All of these behaviors are fostered by her own culture, which guides her toward self-effacement and modesty, and by her family, which rears her

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to be interdependent with all her kin. And all of these behaviors are opposite to those expected in the American classroom. The game-structured, role-playing American curriculum is strange to the Vietnamese student. He has been taught to listen to his teacher, mimic that model, take copious notes, memorize them, and produce verbatim whatever he has been given throughout the course in writing at the end. But American teachers ask questions for which there are many answers, or none, sometimes. They expect him to perform verbally and spontaneously, when he has been patterned to behave differently by his own culture. Strangest of all, English examinations often provide all the answers, and the student must only mark the correct ones!

The ESOL teacher is cautioned to take cognizance of the deep cultural differences between Vietnamese and American people. The student is not to be forced into a new mold, but must be gently led to appreciate the values of a strange society so that he can communicate effectively with Americans. Building upon commonalities can bring out many reserved personalities, and prove that all human beings share some universal goals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In order to deal effectively with Indochinese students, the ESOL teacher must be aware of the vast cultural shock facing the new immigrants. Programs such as the Multiculture

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Workshops conducted by the Montgomery County (MD) public school system, help educators to see briefly through other eyes. For example, a short film narrated by a Chinese high school boy follows him from home to school and back again--literally into two different worlds.

The affective and sociological factors in learning styles and problem-solving techniques must be studied along with those already researched in the cognitive area, so that a truer picture of the total learner can emerge. Especially is this necessary in the field of ESOL, because the cultural factors that influence educational motivation and achievement are complex and interactive.

Finally, those individuals who have achieved well in the western world should be brought back into the classroom as tutors and peer counselors, to help their compatriots to conquer the cultural shock of life in the New World.

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